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ABSTRACT

This bulletin identifies and discusses issues surrounding collaborative arrangements and partnerships for British technical colleges and gives guidance on identifying, setting up, and maintaining such arrangements. Some potential advantages and disadvantages of partnerships are listed. A checklist follows of the most common partners in collaboration with some illustrative examples of the purposes of collaboration. These issues and tensions are then discussed: competition/collaboration debate, approaches to partnership, and significance of incorporation. The following lists of dos and don'ts reflect the real experiences of the colleges involved in partnerships and the lessons learned. Fourteen case studies provide insights into a number of specific partnerships, including the following: shared resources, joint program planning and provision, college-school collaboration, shared progression, college liaison with partner and hinterland schools, further and higher education partnership, shared planning and development, shared delivery of National Vocational Qualifications, joint bid for funding, and shared recruitment. Finally, guidelines are presented as a checklist of questions for consideration when reviewing existing partnerships or setting up new partnerships. They address rationale for collaboration, costs and benefits, management, quality, new partnerships, and partnership and management information systems. (YLB)

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March 1994

APPROACHES TO PARTNERSHIPS
who shares wins

ED 369 934

This bulletin is based on the findings of FEU's project **Collaborative arrangements post incorporation** (RP765). Its subtitle is intended to reflect the consensus among those colleges contributing to the project that collaboration between organisations in the planning and provision of further education and training can bring mutual benefits to organisations and individuals involved. That is not to say that partnerships are simple and straightforward, particularly in the new post-incorporation world of FE: hard questions need to be asked; financial calculations need to be done; and relationships and contractual obligations need to be clarified if collaborative arrangements are to be effective and productive.

The aims of this bulletin are:

- to identify and discuss some of the issues surrounding collaborative arrangements and partnerships;
- to give guidance on identifying, setting up and maintaining such arrangements.

It is directed at:

- college managers involved in strategic planning;
- college managers with responsibility for external relations;
- those staff with operational responsibility for specific links and partnerships in colleges (schools liaison, FE/HE franchises, community links);
- TEC managers of Strategic Education Forums.

A note on terminology

A range of terms is used currently to describe collaborative arrangements between institutions and agencies involved in the planning and provision of further education and training. Some, like franchising and compacts, describe a specific, well recognised type of arrangement; others, such as partnership and collaboration, are used more generally as overarching terms that can encompass more specific arrangements. Within this bulletin the terms partnership and collaborative arrangement or venture are used interchangeably and no distinction is intended.

Collaboration between planners, providers and consumers of education and training is not a new idea. There are many examples of well-established or emerging partnerships. Colleges have linked with schools, often through TVEI consortia; with HE to facilitate progression through Access programmes or franchised provision; with employers through compacts; with voluntary and statutory agencies through a range of joint ventures; and, more recently, with TECs. Frequently the LEA has been responsible for instigating or overseeing collaborative ventures and acting as broker between partners.

Some potential advantages and disadvantages of partnerships

Advantages:

- coherent and comprehensive provision
- continuity and progression
- enhanced opportunities for access and participation
- bigger pool of clients so bigger market share for everyone
- economies of scale — broader, more flexible and cost-effective offer
- sharing of information, expertise, plant - reduction in workload, wastage, cost, time

Disadvantages:

- denial of free market and role of enterprise
- loss of autonomy/fear of takeover
- increased complexity of financing, managing and monitoring such arrangements

The incorporation of FE and sixth-form colleges as a result of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act and the subsequent removal of the LEA's strategic planning role created a 'free market' where colleges have independence to decide their mission, their market and their strategy. As a result, the sense of competition between providers has inevitably been heightened and the consequences of under-recruitment or overspending have become very real. It is hardly surprising that some colleges are approaching notions of partnership and sharing with increasing caution.

CE 066 368

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At the same time, widening access and increasing participation and achievement have become familiar as the Government's current stated aims for FE. These have been underpinned by initiatives such as the National Targets for Education and Training and are reflected in the demand- and achievement- led elements in the new funding proposals of the Further Education Funding Councils for England and Wales. For these aims to be fulfilled, learners must have access to comprehensive, coherent and flexible provision with clear progression opportunities. There are concerns that without collaborative provision, there may be fragmentation and some provision may become more vulnerable. Colleges may concentrate on provision in the areas that are cheapest to resource or where demand is greatest; this might be at the expense of the longer-term interests of the economy or the needs of particular groups of learners.

Some key questions for further education and training providers over the last 18 months or so have therefore been:

- How can adequate provision be secured, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups?
- When, and in what areas, is competition desirable and justifiable?
- Which niche markets can be developed?
- How can learners be protected from the results of the destructive forms of competition?
- How can fruitful collaborative arrangements be developed that are cost-effective for the provider as well as beneficial to the learner?

INSIGHTS INTO PARTNERSHIPS

Earlier FEU investigations had shown that although colleges engaged in a wide range of collaborative arrangements with different institutions and agencies, these arrangements were often historical rather than strategic, were not always resourced adequately or managed effectively, and that there was relatively little monitoring of quality. FEU therefore drew up a set of guidelines for collaborative ventures. Eight colleges, all committed to partnership approaches, were invited to identify their collaborative arrangements with other organisations, then to test the guidelines against a number of specific examples of partnership and to comment on their appropriateness and usefulness. At the end of the project colleges were asked to draw up a list of dos and don'ts based on their own experiences of collaborative ventures (see p.6).

Existing partnerships

The range of partnerships revealed by the college audits was vast. On the next pages is a checklist of the **most common partners in collaboration** revealed by the project with, in each case, some illustrative examples of the purposes of collaboration. Selected case studies appear on pages 7-10.

College/college

- TVEI consortia
- Consortia of colleges with HE institution
- Development work e.g. implementation of EMIS examination module

No examples of collaboration between FE and sixth-form colleges were given although the project eventually identified and investigated a specific case study of such a partnership.

College/school - secondary, primary, special

Secondary

- TVEI consortia
- Links over recording achievement and progression issues
- Provision of training by college to school
- Links over curriculum projects
- Franchising of provision to school

Primary/secondary

- Use of school rooms by college (often free of charge)
- Work experience

Special schools

- In joint planning, joint and linked provision and over progression issues.

College/HE

- Franchising and alternative similar provision
- Validation of programmes
- Progression/admissions
- Certificate in Education consortium of HE and FE institutions

College/AE

- Planning provision
- Sponsorship by colleges of Schedule 2 work in AE institutions

College/TEC

- Funding
- Business education partnerships
- Working together to deliver NVQs
- Normal liaison expected/required with TEC

College/employers

- Employer used for:
  work experience
  advice, guidance, consultancy in curriculum development
  talks to students
  sponsorship
- College used for:
  specialist equipment (e.g. CAD/CAM) and product development
  training

College/voluntary and/or statutory agencies

- Use of rooms
- Information exchange
- Curriculum development
- Specialist advice, guidance
- Work experience
- Joint working parties
- Promotion of training/qualifications

Examples of agencies

Youth and community service, e.g:
  support and guidance to Student Union Executive
  Section 11 youth workers involved in working with college students
  membership of executive steering committee
  joint community meetings
  joint development of provision

Careers service, e.g:
  publicity
  information
  networking
  referral

Social services, e.g.
  work experience
  jointly devised action plans for clients
  joint resourcing of staff training units
  joint NVQ assessor training
  use of rooms
  information
  networking

Community/specialist groups, e.g:
  information
  guidance
  liaison
  outreach
  use of rooms for outreach/community work
  joint provision and progression (eg. ESOL/ABE)
  curriculum development
  joint recruitment

Library service, e.g:
  basic skills provision

College LEA

- Statutory provision eg: transport, educational psychology service
- Staff development

College/private providers

- Joint projects
- Joint market research
- Specialist firm or agency for services to college
- Access to accreditation for employers
- Access to open learning resources for college
- Provision of joint training activities

College/overseas college or agency

- Student/teacher exchange
- Materials development
- Educational projects
- Distance learning materials

Combination of agencies/institutions

- Information exchange
- Careers conventions
- Progression
- Training of staff e.g. management training (FE/HE/LEA)
- Co-ordinating planning of provision e.g. adult provision
- Networking, e.g. Adult Guidance Network

Consortia with specific brief

Development of Record of Achievement

Other purposes for collaboration included:

- networking and support often of specific groups of staff with common interests, e.g. staff developers, welfare officers, computer users
- special development projects, e.g. implementation of EMIS examination module
- liaison and information
- funding e.g. ESF
- specific agencies to supply specific services, e.g. payroll

Disappearing partnerships

Colleges participating in the project were asked to identify the likely consequences of partnerships ceasing. Consequences identified tended to be confined to the immediate and most obvious:

> *'the class would have to close and the link with the school would be lost'*
>
> *'loss of funding and therefore, almost certainly, loss of provision'*
>
> *'a loss of revenue to the college'*

or to general effects such as:

> *'loss of valuable link with local community'*
>
> *'less varied relevant curriculum'*
>
> *'more isolation'*

Some more far-reaching consequences were identified:

> *'an accelerated literacy deprivation spiral in the area'*
>
> *'poorly targeted provision .... poor planning and weakening of local community planning' (for Social and Voluntary Services links)*
>
> *'the contribution which our industrial contacts make to the achievement of the identified objectives would be sorely missed'*
>
> *'loss of coherent strategies, loss of continuity for students in transition from school to college' (Recording of Achievement consortium)*
>
> *'the two organisations....would compete rather than collaborate which could conceivably result in the client company not being provided with the most appropriate service'*

Loss of income, although identified as a consequence of a collaborative arrangement ceasing, was not an overriding concern:

> *'loss of income to the college .... significant but not primary purpose of the activities'*

In the course of FEU's project it became apparent that it would not be easy to draw up clear-cut guidelines that could be applied to the setting up and monitoring of all partnership arrangements. There were contradictions and tensions in many areas which led colleges to say 'well, that depends' or 'yes but....'.

The competition/collaboration debate

Colleges involved in this project expressed mixed views on when to collaborate and when to compete. While recognising the heightened sense of competition — most evident between colleges or colleges and schools — they acknowledged the value, and indeed the necessity in some cases, of collaboration and were concerned to assess what could make partnerships work in practice. The following quotations reflect some of these views:

> *'Corporations will need to be convinced of the advantages of partnership given the increased emphasis on individualism and competition'*
>
> *'Incorporation has made us far more sensitive to working with other providers in a complementary manner'*
>
> *'While we have established a range of worthwhile collaborative arrangements such as common enrolment dates, clearing house, joint marketing. etc. we still have to recognise that we are in competition for student enrolment'*
>
> *'External levers which encourage collaboration must be for the benefit of everyone including staff and students as well as managers'*

It was noticeable that the most commonly given reasons for collaboration were still primarily to do with increasing opportunities for learners and enhancing the quality of provision rather than making money, even though a shared use of resources or shared developments could save money and/or time. Reasons included:

- providing for the educational needs of the local community;
- providing a framework for creating educational opportunities for people with mental health problems;
- to develop non-traditional access routes into HE;
- providing access for members of local ethnic minority communities;
- offering vocational education, on school premises, for adults;
- to inform the process of transfer and progression;
- to develop common principles for ensuring quality.

There was also universal acknowledgement of the value of collaborating for reasons such as networking, support, dissemination of good practice, and exchange of information and expertise.

Not surprisingly, collaboration between colleges was seen to be more threatening than collaboration with other types of institution or agency. The project revealed few college/college partnerships; where these existed they were often based on TVEI consortia or were part of a larger consortium including higher education institutions and with HE links in mind rather than lateral FE links thereby reducing the element of direct competition. Interesting collaborative initiatives had also been set up between colleges that were geographically distant from each other and where competition for students within a catchment area was not an issue. These included the development of a common computer network and FE/HE links based round one HE institution. In one case, however, a sixth form college and an FE college had collaborated in delivering BTEC/GNVQ programmes but each capitalising on its own strengths to create, jointly, a comprehensive offer rather than competing.

Approaches to partnership

In spite of the agreed need to establish clear aims and to resource and manage partnerships better, particularly given the increased emphasis on accountability and cost-effectiveness in the post-incorporation world, there was a strong feeling that formal procedures should be treated with caution and care taken to use them appropriately.

Procedures or creativity?

There is a significant difference between informal or short-term partnerships and formal or large-scale arrangements. The former can be inhibited by over-formal systems. Similarly, in the early speculative stages of collaboration the commitment of individual staff may be more relevant than structures. Establishing a partnership is a developmental process. It is important not to straitjacket such developments or to stifle creativity, speculation and risk taking. As one college pointed out, however much one may wish to plan strategically, possible new ventures can 'pop up outside the planning cycle' and cannot always be put on hold without risking missing a valuable opportunity.

Systems or personalities?

While structures and accountability can and should support effective collaboration personalities can play a key role both in the initial stages of building a partnership and in ensuring their continuing success. A mismatch of personalities or an insensitive approach can have just as detrimental an effect on a collaborative venture as poor planning and structures:

> *'There has to be trust in a relationship'*

> *'Some people prefer precision and structures, others a more open-ended agenda'*

Sometimes the lack of comparable structures in institutions, particularly where several partners are involved, can make it difficult to establish clear and workable systems.

Costs and benefits

It is often difficult to calculate costs and benefits with any precision or to determine accurately what indirect or long-term benefits might accrue. Even if the real costs can be quantified it may not always be possible to meet these, particularly costs in time; much will inevitably still depend on good will.

Judgements will have to be made and the inability precisely to quantify costs and benefits should not necessarily deter colleges from going ahead:

> *'Applying a rigorous cost benefit analysis would kill some collaborations before they started!'*

Nor will the benefits enjoyed by each of the participating organisations always be neatly balanced:

> *'Everyone's self interest cannot be met all of the time.'*

Formal contracts - useful or prejudicial?

In the same way that systems and procedures need to be treated with caution, the need for a formal contract will depend very much on the type of partnership, its legal implications, the sums of money involved and the extent and consequences of accountability:

> *'Formal contracts can prejudice existing relations; equally the absence of a contract can lead to huge problems.'*

Different institutions - different values and experiences

There is a danger in assuming that institutions and agencies with which colleges might collaborate will share the same values or be at the same stage of development or thinking. Different values will not necessarily make collaboration impossible but can lead to misunderstandings if these are not acknowledged and examined to assess how they might affect the working relationship. Through negotiation it will often be possible to reach a shared understanding and method of working.

The significance of incorporation

Because of the increased emphasis in all areas on accountability, cost-effectiveness, and coherent and transparent planning there is likely to be more pressure to formalise collaborative arrangements or at least to think through more carefully the costs and benefits of entering into partnerships. The area most likely to be threatened by feelings of greater competition is that of college/college collaboration.

DOS AND DON'TS

The following lists reflect the real experiences of the colleges involved in partnerships and the lessons learned.

They also point up some of the tensions discussed in this bulletin and some of the potential dangers of applying 'rules' indiscriminately. Indeed, within each list there may be statements that appear to conflict with each other, illustrating that what might be appropriate for one type of partnership will not necessarily work for another.

DO:

- check on existing collaborative arrangements within your own institution, history and context, to ensure there is no conflict of interest;
- have a very clear objective for the collaboration — it gives a precise, identifiable focus and a time horizon that people can cope with;
- define, at the outset, what will happen if/when the objectives have been achieved;
- ensure that the person who collaborates on behalf of the other organisation is empowered to act;
- ensure that you are recognised within your own institution as the person who is responsible for these collaborative arrangements

or

- consider carefully who is the college's voice in setting up and managing the collaboration. Are they effective communicators, committed to the collaboration, able to speak with authority on behalf of the organisation?
- get headings of agreement between the heads of institutions before you start
- have a team and team leader(s) with clearly defined terms of reference
- acknowledge the importance of inter-personal skills in conduct ing collaborative arrangements: if good relations are in jeopardy, be prepared to recognise that somebody else may be better placed to progress the work
- establish networks, teams and ownership
- decide who needs to know what and ensure people are kept informed
- be able to delegate
- be trustworthy
- ensure demonstrable accountability on both sides
- consider the financial/legal implications of the collaboration, e.g. if it results in a project which requires staffing, who will the staff be employed by **in law**
- consider every eventuality, however unlikely it seems, at the outset, e.g. what if the project fails and the staff are potentially redundant
- be aware of current practice and legislation in areas other than education, e.g. community care
- analyse thoroughly and explicitly the costs and benefits of the collaboration but recognise that both need to be broadly defined, i.e. not just in financial terms
- consider the cost of not entering into the arrangement
- be flexible — consider improbable ideas and think around such things as resources
- be prepared to take calculated risks — you don't know what you might lose
- have a means of assessing the cost implications of the collaboration — in the planning and delivery stage
- get a collaborative fund to look after the expenses of preparatory work on a scheme
- have a means of assessing the student views of the collaboration
- be able to 'needs lead' by asking students what they want
- let common sense prevail!

DON'T:

- assume that collaboration is, of itself, 'a good thing'
- be afraid to say no to unrealistic expectations of service delivery
- jump in without an audit of existing collaborative arrangements: avoid replication of effort
- impose lengthy formal processes where creativity might be stifled
- be fettered by roles of formal liaison but don't work against your own institution and alienate anyone
- be put off by the risks of leading with innovation
- be tempted to allow all costs, individually identified, to outweigh the possible value of an imprecise valuation of benefits
- be frightened to speculate but weigh up recklessness
- be afraid of subsidising if it is a conscious attempt to gain an objective
- become an 'educational island'
- be frightened to share planning and resources
- underestimate the powerful effect on success or failure exerted by the personalities of the leading figures
- load too much on one person
- be negative and lose heart
- be afraid to stop at regular intervals and ask 'Is this collaborative venture proving the best approach in terms of providing the best course for the students?'
- try to continue with a collaborative arrangement in its current form if it is not working

The following case studies provide insights into a number of specific partnerships

Shared resources: a common computer network

Four FE colleges, all geographically dispersed and therefore not drawing students from the same catchment area, share a common computer network.

The arrangement arose out of meetings between interested principals about the way forward on a range of curriculum issues. It aims to give students and staff access to more software than would be available in one college including a large CD ROM stock. The network will assist in developing self directed learners, in modularising the curriculum and in helping learners to map their way through their learning programme to accreditation. It also carries electronic mail and the possibility of rapid extension of the network to other public and private sector institutions.

The arrangement is managed by a group at principal level supported by four working groups of senior staff concerned with all aspects of curriculum and service development and material acquisition. Because of the large amounts of money involved there are formal contract agreements between the various parties drawn up by solicitors.

There has been a large capital investment in the network but the potential benefits in cost savings on programme delivery and more efficient organisation of the curriculum are thought to be considerable . If the arrangement ceased, student numbers would soon be reduced, an important and progressive learning strategy would be lost and further opportunities to learn lessons about the management of collaborative projects would cease.

Joint programme planning and provision: FE/sixth-form college

A sixth-form college and an FE college in very close proximity have made a joint submission for a BTEC National Diploma in General Art and Design. The submission was designed to take advantage of their complementary skills and resources. They have also introduced a joint BTEC National Diploma in Science.

They have a history of close collaboration over curriculum planning and a long-standing joint admissions policy. A curriculum group was established in 1992 to maintain the collaborative approach post incorporation. Both colleges favourite as the best means of serving the needs of the community. Institutional choice is seen as of secondary importance to meeting the needs of the individual student.

The aims of the arrangement are to provide a coherent programme of post-16 education for the local community by making the best possible use of joint resources. Their view is that without such an arrangement, there would be reduction in choice for students and unnecessary competition and duplication of provision, and also a loss of staff development opportunities and cross-fertilisation of ideas among staff.

Provision is jointly funded on a pro-rata basis according to the extent of input onto the course. The Art students are registered at the FE college and the Science students at the sixth-form college for the purpose of FEFC funding. No formal contract between colleges was considered necessary because of the long established good relations. Provision has, however, been costed in a detailed manner to establish each college's financial commitment and a review of the financial arrangements will be carried out after one year.

College/school collaboration: from ad hoc arrangement to shared strategy

The FE college and a local grant maintained (GM) school work together to provide vocational education on school premises to adults. The arrangement grew out of ad hoc links with the school and was prompted by the school's GM status.

Issues of style and manner of delivery, programme content, quality control standards and progression had to be addressed.

It was already part of the college's plan to extend its adult programmes over the whole geographical area and working with the school was felt most likely to achieve an accepted presence at the northern tip of the territory. It was also part of the school's plan to establish itself as providing for the whole community. Such and arrangement was therefore of mutual benefit to the two providers.

Shared progression: federation of schools and college

The FE college works in partnership with a federation of over 50 schools, an arrangement which arose from a failed plan for tertiary education. The federation includes schools of all types: nursery, infant, junior, secondary, a combined sixth- form provision with adult education, and special schools. Local employers and HE institutions are also active in the partnership.

The federation is managed by the secondary heads and the college principal through a director who manages on behalf of the groups. The director's post is jointly funded by the schools and college.

The overall aim of the federation is to work together to improve standards of education for the community. The federation operates according to a set of shared principles which were drawn up and agreed between heads of institutions. Among these are commitments to:

- provide support for all organisations;
- facilitate continuity and progression within schools and across phases;
- facilitate development of cross-network collaboration;
- facilitate a collective voice for responding to local and national education issues and securing resource entitlements;
- share resources and expertise;
- communicate information for the benefit of all;
- improve the effective working partnership with employers;
- improve further the partnership with parents and governors;
- improve the links with the local community;
- develop better understanding between individual schools.

Areas of collaboration include curriculum development, resourcing and in-service training. Specific initiatives include a sixth-form bursary scheme based on a compact and a 'value-added' project designed to improve standards of literacy.

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College liaison with partner and hinterland schools

This arrangement involves the FE college, six local schools, over 30 other schools within a radius of 30 miles of the college, Careers Services locally and in neighbouring counties and other Local Authority services. The purpose of the partnership is to inform the process of transfer and progression. Its explicit objectives are:

- to provide comprehensive information, guidance and advice to pupils, their parents and teachers about the range of opportunities available at the college;
- to use the interviewing process as a tool to aid programme choice, and where possible to confirm that the young person has the talents and aptitude to benefit from the chosen course of study;
- to respond to individual special needs of prospective students in terms of access and learning support.

The partnership was prompted by secondary re-organisation in the town which resulted in virtually all post-16 provision being transferred to the college. Although probably seen at the time as an interim measure to safeguard the transfer and progression interests of pupils in the town, the partnership concept grew stronger with time and the benefits of a 3-19 educational framework was given a high profile in the local institutions.

Considerable resources are devoted to the arrangement. A heads group consisting of schools heads and the college principal have strategic responsibility; a continuity and progression committee, consisting of the deputy principal and director of admissions at the college and the deputy heads of schools, are responsible for liaison and research including INSET, Subject Panels, curriculum development and research into pupil results and progression. A joint publicity spread is printed in a local newspaper presenting the schools and college as a partnership. There is regular liaison with the Careers Service.

The benefits to staff and students in all institutions are considerable, including the level of student satisfaction with eventual choice - an important consideration in view of FEFC funding proposals for the future. In view of the need for an eight per cent increase in enrolments it is seen as important to make an investment in the quality and consistency of guidance offered in the pre-entry phase.

Further and higher education partnership: an alternative to franchising

Ten FE colleges and one university have developed alternative access-to-HE arrangements for adults. The developments arose in response to the reduction in discretionary awards and a growing dissatisfaction with franchising arrangements which precluded the colleges from developing their own HE curriculum. The provision is specifically aimed at groups of learners who have not traditionally participated in HE. The programmes are modular and encompass various modes of attendance. All course proposals are validated by the university.

Each participating college has written its own HE development plan; there is also a corporate further and higher partnership strategic plan written by all the colleges working together. The partnership is managed by a group at principal level assisted by a think tank and task group. Working to the principals' group is a co-ordinating group consisting of senior staff who are responsible for implementing the programmes at college level. This group is assisted by four co-ordinators who negotiate and chase progress. There are also a number of inter-college working groups responsible for developing the curriculum prior to validation.

A fund has been established by the colleges and the university to pay for the time of the four co-ordinators. All colleges have completed financial projections for the developing HE programmes based on fees and core funding. There has been no detailed assessment of the real costs of running the programme but the arrangements have so far led to far more rapid curriculum development than would otherwise have happened.

As well as the benefits to learners there have been spin-off benefits for the college through contracts gained for various activities as a result of this collaboration.

Further and higher education partnership: a flexible approach

The college developed joint provision with the local university as part of its strategy to provide opportunities for students to take vocationally relevant HE programmes locally, working in association with selected universities. There was a commitment on behalf of the college to cater for students in the vicinity who had strong preferences for studying in one locality on a full- or part-time basis and to offer modules which fitted into the university's common framework.

The college's Director of Curriculum Development and Quality has overall responsibility for the arrangement with appropriate heads of department and heads of section undertaking detailed work on the college's curriculum offer. Both institutions are committed to signing a memorandum of co-operation.

Programmes are funded in a range of ways including: by the student on a full cost basis; full-time through HEFC's core proposals element; franchised with the college receiving an allocation per student from the university relative to its own HEFC funding.

Shared planning and development: college/TEC collaboration

Four colleges have collaborated with each other and the TEC by forming a TEC principals' group. The group started as an informal network which later grew and was formally established through a joint conference.

The purpose of collaboration is:

- to promote co-operation between the colleges;
- to develop ways of sharing and disseminating good practice;
- to stimulate common approaches to curriculum development;
- to develop common principles for ensuring quality.

The principals' group oversees and acts as a steering group for any jointly run projects. The joint staffing of projects is fully costed but offset in real terms on a quid pro quo basis. An example of such an initiative is a joint TEC-funded project on quality. A consultant in whom all four colleges felt confidence was contracted to audit the quality approaches of each college. This led to a larger Moorfoot-funded exercise to develop such approaches. The intention is not for the colleges to share the same mechanisms, but for them to learn from each other's processes.

The arrangement is felt to help maintain a balance between free market competition and the need to collaborate in providing an educational service across the TEC area.

NVQs: a case for shared delivery

Following the launch of Level 3 NVQ standards for Physiological Measurement in December 1992, a number of common problems and concerns arose regarding the implementation of the standards. However there was a great deal of support for a scheme that would integrate the existing college-based BTEC National Certificate in Science programme (Medical Physics and Physiological Measurement) with the workplace training and assessment in a cost effective way.

As a result of the small number of candidates within each of the four Physiological Measurement specialities a Consortium consisting of the FE college and a number of Regional Health Authorities was proposed so that the training could be centralised and the work place assessment co-ordinated centrally.

The centre for the consortium will be based at the college and managed by the Section Head of Medical Technology and a co-ordinating internal verifier for each of the specialities will be based at the college. An independent Steering Group has been formed and will be chaired by the Regional Scientific Officer for the Regional Health Authority. The costs of the centre will be split equally amongst the number of candidates registering with the centre annually.

Currently three Regional Health Authorities and three independent hospital departments have contracted with the consortium. Two other Regional Health Authorities and the Armed Forces have identified that they will contract with the consortium in 1994.

Without the FE college and the Regional Health Authorities forming a consortium the Physiological Measurement NVQ standards would not have been implemented this year. Currently the consortium is the only centre offering the Physiological Measurement standards nationally.

A joint bid for funding: enhancing basic skills provision

The FE college and the County Library Service prepared a joint bid for funds to develop and deliver a programme of basic skills using library premises. The aim was to deliver an increased and widespread basic skills provision, particularly to learners in rural areas. Costs of people's time and some materials were included in the bid; room space was given free of charge.

A certain sensitivity about territory, position and control was accepted from the outset. Some considerable time was invested in preparation and consultation to ensure that all participants had their own role in both the bidding process and the operation.

Such an arrangement would be of benefit to the library service by introducing more people to their facilities, and to the dispersed local community by providing access to programmes in their locality in a known environment. In addition, the opportunities for progression could be stressed, contacts made and, possibly, more basic skills volunteers encouraged.

Mental health provision: joint planning and delivery

This partnership includes the FE college, the local authority Mental Health Association and Social Services. Its aims are to develop opportunities for access to the full range of community education activities and to the widening options in further education and training for people with or recovering from mental illness. Specific objectives are:

- to provide support and guidance to people suffering from mental ill-health;
- to establish a learning partner scheme, recruiting and supporting volunteers to be learning partners acting in a befriending role and attending with the client a course/activity of their mutual choice.

Indirect and important benefits to carers are the increased motivation and enhanced quality of life of those they support.

The scheme is seen by the college as a totally integrated project with other service providers. It is funded entirely by a specific Mental Health Grant.

Shared recruitment: working with ethnic minority groups

The FE college has collaborated with the Economic Development Unit, the Community Relations Council, Education and Training Sub-group, the Adult Education Centre and the TEC in order to improve access to education and training opportunities for members of the local ethnic minority communities.

Two senior members of the College staff have shared responsibility for developing collaboration.

To date initiatives have included:

- regular meetings with the Community Relations Council and community leaders to identify needs and barriers to access;
- working with the Adult Education Centre to develop a more coherent and progressive ESOL provision;
- the appointment of a 0.5 ESOL tutor;
- securing ESF with TEC support to provide vocational training and language support;
- obtaining ESF to provide a 13 week planning period starting April 1993.

As well as the obvious benefits to groups of learners, it was felt that staff had benefited from more direct contact with representatives from groups from a variety of cultural backgrounds and that practice had improved as a result. There had also been an increased understanding of the importance of outreach work and networking.

'Computer View' - joint provision for people with visual impairment

This programme is the result of collaboration between the FE college, the Bristol Royal Society for the Blind (BRSB), Unilever Export International and Opportunities for People with Disabilities.

The purpose of the arrangement is to widen access to the curriculum for people with visual impairment. It offers students the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the special adaptations which they need in order to use information technology. They are able to build confidence in the use of computers and to achieve a range of competences, before moving into a work placement leading to employment, or into a mainstream college course. By the end of the course each participant should have realised an individual pre-set goal following initial assessment and the accreditation of prior learning.

'Computer View' as the initial project later became known came about because the Director of the Bristol Royal Society for the Blind had identified the need and had been negotiating with Unilever over the provision of specialist equipment at the same time. It was through the college Special Support Co-ordinator and her contact with the Director of BRSB that an initial meeting was called. BRSB initially agreed to fund 120 hours of 'course time'; Unilever provided the specialist equipment, which currently includes HAL speech synthesizers and LUNAR large print software, used with IBM PCs, and a Braille embosser.

Without this provision students would not have the benefit of the high level of support provided before progressing onto mainstream courses. Other students would lose out on the opportunity to meet and talk with students with disability. Future plans include widening links with employers, initially through an open day. There is also a link with the Employment Services' rehabilitation programme, operated by the PACT.

Promoting opportunities for adults through joint planning

The FE college works with representatives from local secondary schools, a nearby university, the WEA, the Youth and Community Service and the Voluntary sector over provision for adult learners. Their aim is to raise the profile of the varied opportunities for adults.

Developments arose out of a genuine desire to rationalise adult provision within the locality. They were initiated by the college, prompted by funding from the LEA, and had the clear aim of encouraging more participation.

All the adult participants have their own special interests and preferences. The different providers, rather than competing with one another and causing confusion among participants, established a varied but complete and rational picture of what was available, with passages across and through the programmes identified.

In spite of the contradictions and tensions surrounding collaboration it was clear that there were key issues that needed addressing in all partnership arrangements. The guidelines below are intended as a checklist of questions for consideration when reviewing existing or setting up new partnerships.

An overview

A useful starting point can be to identify existing partnership arrangements in order to gain some overview of the extent and nature of these. Such an exercise could be comprehensive and include as wide a range of types of collaboration as possible or more selective to investigate a particular type of partnership, for example with voluntary agencies or with employers. Once partnerships have been identified the following questions can be used to review them. They can also be used for consideration when setting up new partnerships.

Rationale for collaboration

Partnerships, even speculative or informal ones, should have a clear rationale and identifiable aims

Questions:

- What are the aims of the partnership?
- How do these relate to your college mission and values?
- How do they relate to the mission and values of partner organisations? Are they consistent with these?
- What mechanisms are there for reviewing the aims and objectives of the arrangement to ensure the continuing relevance of the partnership?
- What have you done to ensure the aims are shared and owned by the staff involved?
- Are certain types of partnership part of your college's strategic plan? What are these?
- How do the aims and objectives of these contribute to the achievement of institutional objectives?

Costs and benefits

In any partnership there is likely to be a combination of institutional self interest and mutual benefit. Before reaching a decision to collaborate, or when reviewing a partnership, the costs and benefits of the proposed arrangement need to be weighed up. The decision need not be a simple yes or no but might be to set up a pilot phase, to collaborate on a more limited basis, to time-limit the arrangement or to reconsider the possibility at a later date.

Questions:

- What might the benefits of the partnership be for the college, e.g. shared costs — time and money, shared expertise, shared materials, equipment, space?
- Who will benefit and in what ways, e.g. learners, staff, the institution as a whole?
- Are the benefits short-, mid-, long-term?
- What might be the indirect or spin-off benefits and who might be the beneficiaries?
- In what way is the provision or service resulting from the arrangement likely to be significantly better than 'going it alone'?
- What are the visible costs of the partnership in time and money?
- What are the start-up or development costs as opposed to the running costs?
- What are the hidden or indirect costs, e.g. loss of autonomy, loss of flexibility, damaged relationships elsewhere?
- What are the costs to learners, staff and the institution as a whole if the arrangement fails? Is the risk worth taking?
- What are the costs of not collaborating?

Management

Partnerships make specific management demands because such arrangements are complex and the chain of accountability longer. Different institutions and agencies may have different approaches to management and different degrees of rigour

Questions:

- Is there a named person responsible for the arrangement?
- Is there a named counterpart in the partner institution?
- Is this known elsewhere in your organisation?
- Are their responsibilities clearly set out? Are there clear lines of accountability?
- Are there clear support systems for administering, recording and reporting on the arrangements?
- In what ways are data related to the arrangement recorded by your Management Information Systems?
- For what purposes is this management information used and by whom?
- Are there explicit terms of reference, a formal agreement or a contract for the partnership? Would this be appropriate?

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Quality

Partnerships should be subject to equally rigorous standards of monitoring and quality assurance as other areas of the organisation's work

Questions:

- Are there appropriate quality indicators and assurance mechanisms for the partnership?
- Are these negotiated and agreed with the partner organisations, taking into account their quality assurance systems?
- Is the partnership monitored and reviewed against its objectives? How, by whom, when and how often?
- Do quality measures address processes as well as outcomes?
- Is the partnership reviewed against the contract agreement?
- What steps are taken to ensure users' views (both learners' and staff's) are sought and taken into account?

New partnerships

FEU's project concentrated primarily on existing or newly developed partnerships in colleges. It did not address the identification of new partners and areas for collaboration. Colleges may want to ask:

- What new areas are there where partnerships might be developed?
- Whose responsibility is it, or should it be, within the college to identify new partnerships?
- What mechanisms are there for doing this?

Partnerships and MIS

This section enlarges on some of the implications of partnerships for the use of MIS.
In what ways are the administrative systems for the partnership linked to your organisation's MIS?
What data and information are input, stored, manipulated and output by the MIS?
Can the MIS of the partner organisation deal with the data involved? Are the partners' systems compatible?
Can data be exchanged easily between institutions - electronically or in other ways?
Does the exchange of information take account of the need for confidentiality, the Data Protection Act etc.? Who has access to information?
Are MIS and curriculum staff jointly involved in designing the record keeping systems?

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the competitive climate engendered by incorporation all the colleges involved in the project acknowledged the benefits of collaboration and could clearly identify what the losses would be if certain forms of collaboration were to cease. Whilst colleges accepted that the increased emphasis on planning, cost-effectiveness and accountability would inevitably and rightly encourage institutions to review partnership arrangements, there were no moves among the colleges participating in this project to abandon partnerships and 'go it alone'. It is hoped that this bulletin has provided some thoughts and guidelines that might assist colleges in reviewing existing and approaching new collaborative ventures. If you wish to contribute to the topic FEU would be pleased to hear your views. In particular we would be interested in responses to the following questions:

- What are your main concerns re collaboration post-incorporation?
- What steps are you currently taking to develop new partnerships and which areas?
- In which areas do you think partnerships are most likely to disappear? What will be the consequences, particularly for learners?

Colleges participating in the project:

Accrington and Rossendale College
City of Westminster College
Harlow College
The Huntingdonshire College
New College, Telford (sixth-form college)
Royal Forest of Dean College
South Bristol College
Telford College

FEU is most grateful to the colleges involved for their contributions to the project, for the debate they stimulated and for their guidance on how the findings and issues might best be presented.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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